New York Theatre Critics' Reviews 1949

Volume XJ Number 28 • Rachel W. Coffin, *Editor* • Week of December 12, 1949

1949 PRODUCTIONS

Premiers in Other Years

Original Reviews Appeared In These Volumes

Stage Play	*Page*
1948 Vol.	
Anne of the Thousand Days	128
*As the Girls Go	159
Don't Listen, Ladies	100
Edward, My Son	214
Goodbye, My Fancy	152
Inside U.S.A.	279
Jenny Kissed Me	112
*Kiss Me, Kate	91
*Lend an Ear	122
Life With Mother	182
Light Up the Sky	148
Love Life	201
*Madwoman of Chaillot (The)	104
Make Mine Manhattan	382
Make Way for Lucia	115
*Mister Roberts	338
My Romance	186
Oh, Mr. Meadowbrook!	108
Private Lives	209
Rape of Lucretia (The)	95
Red Gloves	132
Silver Whistle (The)	139
Small Wonder	244
Summer and Smoke	205
*Where's Charley?	197
Young and Fair (The)	143
1947 Vol.	
High Button Shoes	304
*Streetcar Named Desire (A)	249
1946 Vol.	
Annie Get Your Gun	382
*Born Yesterday	466
1944 Vol.	
Harvey	95

**Asterisks indicate shows scheduled to play week of December 12, 1949*

1949 PRODUCTIONS

Premieres During 1949

Reviews Appear in This Volume

Stage Play	*Page*
All for Love	377
Along Fifth Avenue	392
Anybody Home	346
At War With the Army	336
Big Knife (The)	349
Biggest Thief in Town (The)	325
Blackouts	273
Browning Version (The)	253
Cabalgata	284
*Closing Door (The)	210
*Clutterbuck	205
*Death of a Salesman	358
*Detective Story	330
*Diamond Lil	369
*Father (The)	223
Forward the Heart	374
Funzapoppin	288
Gayden	296
*Gentlemen Prefer Blondes	198
Happiest Years (The)	304
Harlequinade (A)	253
H.M.S. Pinafore	247
*I Know My Love	233
Ivy Green (The)	316
Leaf and Bough	381
*Lost in the Stars	241
Love Me Long	228
Magnolia Alley	308
Metropole	202
Mikado (The)	264
*Miss Liberty	279
Mr. Adam	292
Mrs. Gibbons' Boys	300
*Montserrat	244
My Name Is Aquilon	362
Night in Spain (A) (Cabalgata)	284
Pirates of Penzance (The)	257
*Regina	237
Richard III	365
Shop at Sly Corner (The)	386
Smile of the World (The)	396
*South Pacific	312
*Texas, Li'l Darlin'	214
*That Lady	217
They Knew What They Wanted	314
*Touch and Go	250
Traitor (The)	322
Trial by Jury	247
Twelfth Night	267
Two Blind Mice	342
*Yes, M'Lord	261

CRITICS' CIRCLE AWARD 302

THEATRE OPENINGS

"Metropole" "Clutterbuck"
"Gentlemen Prefer Blondes"

**Asterisks indicate shows scheduled to play week of December 12, 1949*

Theatre Critics' Reviews brings you each week the complete reviews as they originally appeared in these New York newspapers.

NEW YORK JOURNAL-AMERICAN
NEW YORK POST HOME NEWS
NEW YORK DAILY NEWS
NEW YORK MIRROR
NEW YORK WORLD-TELEGRAM
NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE
NEW YORK TIMES
NEW YORK SUN

All Reviews copyrighted by the newspapers and reproduced by permission.

Yearly Subscription $25.00

Published by CRITICS' THEATRE REVIEWS, INC., 235 East 22nd Street, New York 10, N. Y.

"Gentlemen Prefer Blondes"

The New York Times

DECEMBER 9, 1949

'Gentlemen Prefer Blondes,' With Carol Channing, at the Ziegfeld

By BROOKS ATKINSON

Happy days are here again. The musical version of "Gentlemen Prefer Blondes," which lighted the Ziegfeld last evening, is a vastly enjoyable song-and-dance antic put on with humorous perfection. Millions of people doted on Anita Loos' comic fable when it appeared as a play in 1926 with a memorable cast and the laughs pitched fairly low in the diaphragm.

Fortunately they are going to have an opportunity to enjoy it again in a thoroughly fresh treatment. For Miss Loos and Joseph Fields have now fitted it to the formula of an old-fashioned rowdy-dowed with Tin Pan Alley tunes by Jule Styne and some brassy and amusing lyrics by Leo Robin.

* * *

Staged expertly in a festive manner by John C. Wilson, it brings back a good many familiar delights to a street that has been adding art to the musical stage for quite a long time. But thanks to the clowning of Carol Channing, it also brings us something new and refreshing. Let's call her portrait of the aureate Lee the most fabulous comic creation of this dreary period in history.

You will recall Lorelei Lee as the flapper gold-digger who made her way through masculine society with a good deal of success in the Twenties. In Miss Channing's somewhat sturdier image, Lorelei's rapacious innocence is uproariously amusing. Made-up to resemble a John Held creature, she goes through the play like a dazed automaton—husky enough to kick in the teeth of any gentleman on the stage, but mincing coyly in high-heel shoes and looking out on a confused world through big, wide, starry eyes. There has never been anything like this before in human society.

* * *

Miss Channing can also act a part with skill and relish. They have given her a funny autobiographical ballad, "A Little Girl From Little Rock," which she translates into a roaringly entertaining number. She has something original and grotesque to contribute to every number. She can also speak the cock-eyed dialogue with droll inflections. Her Lorelei is a mixture of cynicism and stupidity that will keep New York in good spirits all winter.

Having good taste in general, the producers of "Gentlemen Prefer Blondes" have hired Yvonne Adair to appear with Miss Channing as Dorothy, the more cautious brunette; and Jack McCauley to play the part of Lorelei's protector. Since they are both expert performers with a sense of humor, this turns out to be very happy casting.

A pleasure-mad, teetering old lady by Alice Pearce; a handsome, genteel young man from Philadelphia by Eric Brotherson; a philandering Britisher by Rex Evans, and an indecently healthy zipper manufacturer by George S. Irving—round out the principal performers of a singularly affable cast.

Although the tone of "Gentlemen Prefer Blondes" is old-fashioned, the spirit is modern and the pace is swift. Oliver Smith has provided a suite of good travelogue settings, combining the best features of New York and Paris. And Miles White has designed stunning costumes with a humorous accent.

* * *

Agnes de Mille has done the ballets with a light touch—managing somehow to combine precision dancing with gay improvisations in her pleasant folk style. Anita Alvarez sweeps in and out of the show with a whole series of impish dances, performing one of the best with Kazimir Kokic. As a matter of fact, there is a lot of entertaining and expert dancing through the many scenes of this plausible burlesque of one of the most ancient rackets of the world.

Every part of it is alive and abundantly entertaining. And above it all towers the blonde thatch of Miss Channing, who is batting her big eyes, murdering the English language and carrying the whole golden world along with her by sheer audacity. "Gentlemen Prefer Blondes" was always funny. It is even funnier, now that the lustrous Miss Channing has taken such a strangle hold on the part.

"GENTLEMEN PREFER BLONDES"

Musical comedy, with book by Joseph Fields and Anita Loos; adapted from the novel by Miss Loos; music by Jule Styne; lyrics by Leo Robin; dances and musical ensembles by Agnes de Mille; settings by Oliver Smith; costumes by Miles White; musical direction Milton Rosenstock; musical arrangements, Hugh Martin; lighting by Peggy Clark; entire production staged by John C. Wilson; presented by Herman Levin and Oliver Smith at the Ziegfeld Theatre, December 8, 1949. The cast:

Dorothy Shaw.....Yvonne Adair
A Steward.....Jerry Craig
Lorelei Lee.....Carol Channing
Gus Esmond.....Jack McCauley
Frank.....Robert Cooper
George.....Eddie Weston
Lady Phyllis Beekman.....Reta Shaw
Sir Francis Beekman..Rex Evans
Mrs. Ella Spofford..Alice Pearce
Deck Stewards...Bob Burkhardt and Shelton Lewis
Henry Spofford..Eric Brotherson
An Olympic.....Curt Stafford
Josephus Gage..George S. Irving
Pierre.....Bob Neukum
Gloria Stark.....Anita Alvarez
Bill.....Peter Birch
Joe.....Rex Cooper
Sam.....Bill Bradley
Charlie.....Charles Basile
Taxi Driver.....Kazimir Kokic
Leon.....Peter Holmes
Robert Lemanteur.....Mort Marshall
Louis Lemanteur.....Howard Morris
A Flower Girl...Nicole France
Maitre d'Hotel...Crandal Diehl
Zizi.....Judy Sinclair
Fifi.....Hope Zee
Coles and Atkins...Themselves
The Tenor.....William Krach
Policeman.....William Diehl
Mr. Esmond....Irving Mitchell

Synopsis: Time—1924. Act I—Scene 1: The French Line pier in New York. A midnight sailing. Scene 2: The sun deck of the Ile de France. Third day out. Scene 3: The boat deck. The same day. Scene 4: Lorelei's suite on the Ile de France. Later that day. Scene 5: Paris. The Place Vendome. One week later. Scene 6: Champs de Mars—Under the Eiffel Tower. Same day. Scene 7: The Place Vendome. Later that day. Scene 8: The Ritz Hotel in Paris—Lorelei's suite. That evening. Act II—Scene 1: The pre-Catelan in the Bois. The same evening. Scene 2: A street in Paris. Later that evening. Scene 3: The Ritz Hotel in Paris. Lorelei's suite. Three a. m. the next morning. Scene 4: The Central Park Casino, New York. Ten days later.

DAILY NEWS

DECEMBER 9, 1949

'Gentlemen Prefer Blondes' Just Perfect; Carol Channing Superb

By JOHN CHAPMAN

Do you remember the good old days? Those wonderful days when the world was happy? And those evenings when musical comedies were funny? And when the shows had pretty girls and lots of scenery and costumes, and zip in the music, and plenty of grand dancing? Those days when everybody in the snow was just about the best ever, and taking your girl there made any old night seem just like New Year's Eve? Well, those fine days are right here, right now. The show is "Gentlemen Prefer Blondes," which Herman Levin and Oliver Smith presented last evening at the Ziegfeld Theatre.

This, as you know, is a musical version of Anita Loos' flapper-era novel, and Joseph Fields and Miss Loos have made it into a hilarious libretto. In the role of Lorelei Lee, the blonde from Little Rock, is big, googly-eyed Carol Channing, who certainly is the funniest female to hit the boards since Fannie Brice and Beatrice Lillie began knocking entire audiences out of their seats.

Everything Just Right.

Just wait until you see Miss Channing walk across the stage. Wait until you hear her sing "Diamonds are a Girl's Best Friend." Wait until you hear her explain how the lawyer in Little Rock happened to get taken shot by her revolver. If you hurry over to the Ziegfeld or mail a check you may not have to wait too long—but no matter how long it is, the evening you go will be the holiday of the year.

Everything about "Gentlemen Prefer Blondes" is precisely right. Agnes de Mille has devised some spectacular and witty dances reminiscent of the Charleston era. Co-producer Smith has designed many grand, tasteful and humorous sets, which took this enchanted reporter back to the days of his youth in Paris.

Jule Styne has provided a score that has zest and melody, and Leo Robin has outfitted it with a perfectly chosen set of lyrics. In the pit is Milton Rosenstock's orchestra to give the show a sock and a lift. Hugh Martin has trained an

inordinately attractive chorus to sing some really intelligent and different vocal arrangements, and whoever wrote the music for two solo dance interludes—I suspect it was Don Walker, who is credited with the orchestrations—wrote a couple of musical vignettes which are far above the Broadway average.

The story is about Lorelei Lee and her friend Dorothy Shaw, two Ziegfeld girls who are on the make in 1924. In those times the best place for a girl on the make was Paris, so that is where Lorelei and Dorothy go. Yvonne Adair, a perfect flapper type, is just grand as Dorothy, and all the playmates of Miss Adair and Miss Channing are the most cheerful company one could hope to run into.

And a Cheer for Wilson.

I can't list all those playmates now. But they include Anita Alvarez, a splendid dancer whose modern version of a Gilda Gray shimmy has great wit and style; Jack McCauley, as a rich young button king who is Miss Channing's Daddy; Reta Shaw and Rex Evans, as a titled English pair; Alice Pearce as a hilarious old American tourist in search of a drink; Eric Brotherson as a rugged fellow who still believes in virtue, and Kazimir Kovic, whose dance with Miss Alvarez is one of the best things in the show.

That's all for now. Bless everybody at the Ziegfeld Theatre. And special blessings to John C. Wilson, who has staged "Gentlemen Prefer Blondes" with memorable skill, and to Miles White, who has confected dozens and dozens of hilarious and eye-smiting costumes.

NEW YORK
Herald Tribune
DECEMBER 9, 1949

By HOWARD BARNES

Champagne for This Blonde

ANITA LOOS'S best-seller of the mid-twenties, "Gentlemen Prefer Blondes," has been made into a noisy, jubilant and nostalgic musical comedy at the Ziegfeld. The author and Joseph Fields have conserved the boisterous humor of the original book in their libretto. There are a score of song and dance numbers by Jule Styne and Leo Robin and quaint period costumes by Miles White, while Agnes deMille has devised a variety of fast-stepping routines. Even more important than these assets is the fact that Carol Channing, who distinguished herself so in "Lend An Ear," is an altogether enchanting Lorelei Lee. Her performance is of the first rank. It does wonders in carrying an over-long show through laggard interludes.

* * *

Miss Channing is not only perfectly adapted physically for the predatory blonde of the era of wonderful nonsense; she is a master comedienne. When she is engaged in tracking down millionaires with a combination of Virginia and Arkansas accents, she is hilarious, even when she is only walking stiltedly across the stage. She sings such numbers as "A Little Girl From Little Rock" and "Diamonds Are a Girl's Best Friend" captivatingly and dances the jigs of 1924 as though she had been a participant in them. In her first big assignment she serves notice that she has few peers among musical comedy actresses.

She is surrounded by a large and exuberant company. Yvonne Adair is engaging and proficient as the brunette Dorothy Shaw, who accompanies Lorelei to Paris on the Ile de France as a "chaperon" and picks up a Philadelphia millionaire on the trip. Eric Brotherson is good as the latter and Alice Pearce has some antic passages as the fellow's fun-loving mother. As Lorelei's chief victim, a button manufacturer, Jack McCauley plays a somewhat silly role with attractive ease and Rex Evans is splendid as a titled Englishman who lends Lorelei the money to buy a diamond tiara from his wealthy and stuffy wife.

* * *

The principals do not always have easy sledding. There are forced and irrelevant numbers in the script and in the score which frequently deaden the bounce of the production. The Styne score is wanting in distinction, although the tunes already cited, "Bye, Bye Baby" and "Homesick Blues" are all fetching. Anita Alvarez and a fine line of precision dancers have the best of it with the deMille choreography, which has an unfortunate tendency to take leave of the libretto. John C. Wilson's staging has pace and flavor, but he might well have cut the work more stringently. In any case, "Gentlemen Prefer Blondes" is once more a delight in a new package after a quarter of a century and it boasts a wonderful new star in Miss Channing.

The Sun
DECEMBER 9, 1949

By WARD MOREHOUSE

'Blondes' a Jubilant Hit.

The musical comedy form of the brazen Twenties—lots of dancing from a zestful, high-kicking chorus, some near-nudity and nobody bothering about a ballet—was restored to New York last night as "Gentlemen Prefer Blondes" took over the Ziegfeld Theater. It's a jubilant, old-fashioned show, belonging to the Broadway that used to be, and the Ziegfeld has its tenant for the season.

Anita Loos started all this uproar back in the Coolidge administration when, in riding across the plains in Super Chief comfort, she scribbled some notes about a seemingly innocent but predatory creature known as Lorelei Lee. The book was a best-seller of the hemisphere; the play became a hit in New York and on tour, and now "Gentlemen Prefer Blondes," done with musical trimmings, comes along as a lively and good-looking song and dance show.

The Ziegfeld's new production has style, movement, quite a lot of class and some humor, too. Oliver Smith's scenic backgrounds are simple and imaginative and striking. Miles White has provided fetching costumes. The music of Jule Styne is spirited, the lyrics of Leo Robin are quite all right, and the book of Joseph Fields and Miss Loos, recording the adventures of the all-devouring Lorelei from the New York pier to the Eiffel Tower and back again, is a good enough job of libretto writing.

Agnes deMille, forswearing ballet for the moment and going back to musical comedy fundamentals, has created some exciting dance numbers and, if all this detailing of credits is to be continued, John C. Wilson's overall staging again reveals him to be something of an expert in the field. In these hit-or-nothing days in the theater, Herman Levin and Oliver Smith need have no concern for "Gentlemen Prefer Blondes."

Carol Channing, perhaps not the diminutive girl Anita Loos must have had in mind when she first began writing of the devastating Lorelei, makes a caricature of the heroine, but she's pretty wonderful at that. She makes a caricature and also a character of the purring, drawling, man-snatching, gold-seeking Lorelei, of the vacuous stare and the mincing steps, about as helpless as a fretful boa constrictor, whose idea of security is a great big diamond mine. She has a show-stopping number in "Diamonds Are a Girl's Best Friend."

Yvonne Adair, now an unprotesting brunette, plays Lorelei's companion and co-worker, Dorothy, with sharpness, humor and great assurance. Jack McCauley, always an asset to a musical play, is an engaging Gus Esmond. Reta Shaw, Rex Evans, Eric Brotherson and George S. Irving contribute to the general festivity. Mort Marshall and Howard Morris are amusing as the bearded Frenchmen, father and son. You'll like the nimble team of Coles & Atkins, and Anita Alvarez, who danced so excitingly in "Finian's Rainbow," does it again at the Ziegfeld. Finally, I've come around to the admission that Alice Pearce can be funny. She is very funny as the rejuvenated Mrs. Spofford.

A good show. "Gentlemen Prefer Blondes," going right back to the glories of Ziegfeld, Schwab & Mandel and George White. The town has a new and lively hit.

Journal American

DECEMBER 9, 1949

Gilt and Girly Musical One of Season's Best

By ROBERT GARLAND

As the shows go, it mightn't be a bad idea if Broadway concentrated on musicals for the remainder of the season. So far, song-and-dancers are certainly what 1949-1950 does best. Which is to report that Broadway does best by the new one now in full possession of the Ziegfeld.

So "best" is "Gentlemen Prefer Blondes" done by that the Avenue of the Americas might well be Sixth Avenue once more. Don't tell me Flo Ziegfeld's happy spirit isn't somewhere in his playhouse, applauding — as aren't we all? — a song-and-dancer he'd be glad to put his name to.

For here's a gilt-and-girly extravaganza that, calling itself a musical-comedy, lives all the way up to that delectable designation. No musical drama! No musical play! No musical makeshift of any kind! "Gentlemen Prefer Blondes" is a musical comedy through and through.

Adapted from the "novel" by Anita Loos, it is wonderfully put together under the direction of John Wilson. The story, songs and dances, the settings, costumes and lighting, actually belong. As for Carol Channing, its unstarred star, as the blonde the gentlemen prefer—

Believe me, she'll not be unstarred very long!

* * *

Now's as good a time as any to break down and confess that I've not read the book on which this through and through musical comedy is founded. I never even saw the movie. And if—and I'm sure I must have—I ever saw the play, I don't remember anything about it.

However, in its musical-comedy transcription, "Gentlemen Prefer Blondes" begins with Lorelei Lee setting sail for France and ends with that blonde the gentlemen prefer back home in the Central Park Casino. That was 1924, when the public was not generally admitted.

In between, Miss Lee has herself a time on board the Ile de France, in Paris — the Place Vendome, beneath the Eiffel Tower and in an apartment at the Ritz—and in New York at what was then known as Jimmy Walker's Night Club. Blonde-preferring gentlemen are involved.

Not only Mr. Esmond, her button-making Daddy. But a Mr. Spoffard, who has to do with zippers, a Sir Francis, who has to do with tiaras, and a couple of kissing Frenchmen who are a father and a son. But, for two acts and a dozen scenes, her heart belongs to daddy . . .

Not he, but his diamonds, are the girl's best friend!

* * *

When there's not enough to go around, "Gentlemen Prefer Blondes" puts on the usual show within a show. At the Ziegfeld, it comes in the first scene of the second stanza, with Anita Alvarez stopping both the shows with the unhackneyed superiority of her amazing dancing.

But the entire cast is superior, from the unstarred Miss Channing to the Eddie Weston, who's the last-named member of the ensemble. Yvonne Adair, as Lorelei Lee's "chaperon." Alice Pearce as a lady from Philadelphia. Rex Evans as Sir Francis. Eric Brotherson as Henry Spofford.

Frankly, there's neither space, time nor reason to mention the excellences of Herman Levin-Oliver Smith new musical comedy in detail. Suffice it to assure you that "Gentlemen Prefer Blondes" is the Broadway musical at its 1949-1950 best — shiney, speedy and, in its way, sophisticated.

Even the Agnes de Mille dances possess the shine, the speed and the Broadway sophistication which puts the new tenant of the Ziegfeld high up among the song-and-dancers you really have to see . . .

Happy musical-comedy days are here again. Hurray! Hurray. Hurray!

New York World-Telegram

DECEMBER 9, 1949

Carol Channing Proves Talent In 'Gentlemen Prefer Blondes'

By WILLIAM HAWKINS.

As you might expect, the musical version of Anita Loos' 25-year-old "Gentlemen Prefer Blondes" is gaudy, rip-roaring and brash. If it did nothing else, its purpose would have been served by proving that Carol Channing is one of the most extraordinary people in the entertainment world today.

Even when playing a chorus girl in "Lend an Ear," Miss Channing had a mastodon piquancy that attracted the eye and titillated the sense of humor. Here one suspects that as her endurance and resourcefulness were increasingly revealed in the tryout period, more and more of the show was tossed her way.

Nothing has feazed her. She is giving one of the most ingenious comic performances we have ever seen. It is a brutal assignment, because the Lorelei of Miss Loos' famed chronicle has only one attitude toward life, one facet to her philosophy and one purpose in mind. Her aim is purely and simply: Diamonds via men. The acquisition of the two is a solemn project.

A Creature of Delight.

With posture and stares and the bass bleat in her voice, Miss Channing makes Lorelei a creature of constant surprise and delight. In a wonderful spirit of parody she brightens up the stage with manic elation when the material is there, and when there is little to bite into she indulges in an expression of relaxed pushover honesty that endears her to the world.

Just as a Great Dane insists it is a lap dog, the Channing Lorelei resembles a golden eagle who believes it is a downy and buttercup-colored duckling. Dainty to the death, she trips about as if her slippers were so tight they hurt her all over.

Her expression of agonized necessity on first seeing the tiara is unforgettable, and her explanation of an old shooting is heavenly. Her chants about "Little Rock" and "Diamonds" are tops of the score.

A great many pleasant people have given generously to this big county fair of a show. If it lacks ingenuity and seems to run downhill, perhaps it is because the mere fact that the middle '20s were carefree ceases to be uproarious after a while.

Exciting for One.

Just as the project must be exciting for Anita Alvarez, whose assured dancing twice stopped the performance last night, it must be disappointing for Yvonne Adair. She is far too talented for a compulsion which involves cheer-leading the loudest, jazziest production numbers, following the best comic songs with ballads, and playing sad and straight in those outlandish clothes.

Jack McCauley and Eric Brotherson are lusty, engaging songsters for the principal girls to pursue and Alice Pearce and Rex Evans are jolly additions to the recently historical goings on.

Where Kazimir Kokic has a charming interlude in the Paris street scene, Peter Birch has no distinguished dancing to do.

The saga of Lorelei's and Dorothy's international pursuit of rocks and men takes place largely in some Parisian settings of cleverly astringent taste that make even more remarkable the fantasia of Miles White's costumes.

It is a vivid experience, this "Gentlemen Prefer Blondes," and one likely to get you so in the habit of laughing in its first quarter that you continue without exactly knowing why, to the last whistle.

Daily Mirror

DECEMBER 9, 1949

'Gentlemen Prefer Blondes' Is a Smash Musical

By ROBERT COLEMAN

The perennial "Gentlemen Prefer Blondes" popped up in a musical manifestation at the Ziegfeld Theatre last evening, and delighted a smart first-night audience. Judging by the lusty applause that rocked Billy Rose's handsome house, Lorelei Lee, set a-singing and a-dancing, is going to coin scads of new greenbacks for her creator, Anita Loos.

This, doubtless, will come as no surprise to Miss Loos. for Lorelei, the girl with the golden touch, has already made several fortunes in various literary and theatrical reincarnations. She remains as fascinating as the nostalgia she represents. She is a symbol of the terrific 20s, when a buck was easy to come by and went a long way.

In the current version of "Gentlemen Prefer Blondes," Lorelei is up to her old tricks, acquiring a queen's collection of jewels from a succession of gentlemen susceptible to a blonde boyish bob, a baby stare and nothing much between the ears. She is aided and abetted in tracking down her quarry by her old pal, brunette Dorothy, who unlike Lorelei can fall for a guy without a simoleon.

Producers Herman Levin and Oliver Smith have raided "Lend an Ear" for their Lorelei and Dorothy. Carol Channing, as the bumptious blonde from Little Rock, scored what our ears told us was a triumph. Boy, did she take us back to those wonderful old nights and morns at Texas Guinan's, the Madrid and the Silver Slipper. What a gold digger! What magic memories she evoked with her artful pretense, gravelly voice and mincing walk.

Librettists Loos and Joseph Fields have provided less opportunity for brunette Yvonne Adair, but she makes the most of her chances. Perhaps she will be as fortunate as Miss Channing in finding the right role one of these days. Other first-raters in the cast are Jack McCauley, Alice Pearce, Eric Brotherson, Reta Shaw.

Anita Alvarez, Peter Birch, Kazimir Kokic and Coles and Atkins do full justice to Agnes de Mille's choreography which, though not off the De Mille top shelf, is quite amusing. Miss Alvarez, be it reported, tied up the proceedings with her satires on the modern dance and the shimmy-shewabble.

Jule Styne has composed a pleasant score, and Leo Robin has equipped it with some clever lyrics. Don Walker, Hugh Martin and Trude Rittmann merit salutes for their musical, vocal and dance arrangements. And a posy must go to Milton Rosenstock's ebullient orchestra.

Co-producer Smith's settings and Miles White's costumes are gay and atmospheric, a welcome change from the drab backgrounds and decor which have been haunting us recently.

"Gentlemen Prefer Blondes" is the first smash musical hit of the season. It has its faults, but let's not quibble. Rather, let's pay tribute to Levin and Smith for a tremendous enjoyable evening in the theatre.

The new click opened to an advance sale of over $600,000 the highest we can find in our records. So take our tip and try to buy your tickets immediately.

New York Post

HOME NEWS

DECEMBER 9, 1949

TWO-on-the-AISLE

By Richard Watts Jr.

The eagerly-awaited musical version of Antis Loos' celebrated "Gentlemen Prefer Blondes" had the season's flossiest premiere at the Ziegfeld Theatre last night, where the first audience gave every sign of swooning over it. I have no doubt that it is the town's newest smash hit, and I am sure that Carol Channing, who has the leading role, is today the bright and shining heroine of the public and the critics. But I would be deceiving you if I didn't confess that, although everyone around me seemed to be having the gayest sort of time, the new show struck me as oddly commonplace, while Miss Channing awed, rather than delighted, me.

Let me make myself clear about Carol Channing. There can be no question that she is a shrewd and effective comedienne of great force, skill and originality. Her position in the theatre is already an assured one. Furthermore, playing the role of Lorelei Lee, the innocent, wide-eyed gold-digger of the '20s, she satisfies Miss Loos, who knows more about the character than I do. Nevertheless, the jest inherent in the idea of casting so large, confident and emphatic a young woman as the helpless-looking, shy-seeming Lorelei, whom all the rich men wanted to protect, eluded me last night.

The Amazons

As a matter of fact, the scheme of selecting two such hearty and towering girls as Miss Channing and Yvonne Adair, also from the cast of "Lend an Ear," as Lorelei and her girl friend, Dorothy, and sending them gallumphing about the stage, added, I thought, a rather eerie touch to the proceedings. The sight of a couple of demure and petite young ladies making idiots out of a succession of stalwart men is an amusing one, but I suspect the cream of the joke was spoiled when the girls gave every indication of being able to out-box and out-wrestle any four males in the cast.

Disagreement with the author and producers over the casting is not my only reservation about the musical "Gentlemen Prefer Blondes." Miss Loos' novel was genuinely witty and satirical. It is, in its way, an authentic comedy classic. It seemed to me that virtually all the brilliant wit and satire is absent from the new show, and a kind of routine extravaganza is substituted. Nor does it strike me that the attempt to do an amusing travesty on the Calvin Coolidge days in American history works out triumphantly. Neither the atmosphere nor the burlesque of that atmosphere is effectively present.

John C. Wilson knows how to stage a large, bouncing musical comedy, and "Gentlemen Prefer Blondes" unquestionably has pace and liveliness. A couple of Miss de Mille's dance numbers are pleasantly satirical, and so are some of Miles White's costumes. The music, on the other hand, sounded undistinguished to me last night, and so did the lyrics. Obviously some of the songs are destined to be heard on every radio, but that, you will have to admit, is no evidence against my contention. The old-fashioned Broadway musical comedy can be delightful, whether it is satirized or played straight, but, to me, not in this case.

The acting is, of course, dominated by Miss Channing and Miss Adair, and that domination is not by any means entirely due to their superior physical vitality. Jack McCauley, who knows his way around musical comedy, is pretty much hemmed in by the plot as Lorelei's chief protector, and, of the others, only Anita Alvarez, who dances effectively, has any real personal success. I repeat that "Gentlemen Prefer Blondes" is destined to be a hit. But I must admit that I had more fun at the critically deprecated "Texas, Li'l Darlin'."

"Metropole"

The Sun

DECEMBER 7, 1949

By WARD MOREHOUSE

Actor in Search of a Play.

There's no need for delaying the verdict on "Metropole," written by William Walden and staged, unaccountably enough, by George S. Kaufman, and presented last night at the Lyceum. It's a braying, yapping, knockabout comedy that spins around for two hours and gets nowhere at all. It's not long for this world.

Walden, a new playwright, goes into the private life of the cyclonic editor-in-chief of a weekly magazine and considers the ruction that is brought on when a competitive publisher brings out an imitative weekly and begins hiring away Metropole's contributors and editors. The editor of Metropole is suffering from a case of unfriendly ulcers. The exercises at the Lyceum last evening had the effect of aggravating those of the occupant of the aisle seat C-2.

The mercurial Lee Tracy, one of the most ingratiating actors in the land when given any material, writhes and bellows and whirls his way through the three acts of "Metropole." So much quicksilver, this Tracy, as he snaps and barks and snatches at telephones, just as he did in brighter days and brighter comedies. But it's now done in a hopeless cause. He has no play at all.

Kaufman's direction has, of course, provided pace, but "Metropole" offers little else. There is a lot of movement but little more. The behind-the-scenes detail of the difficulties of running a weekly magazine are neither dramatic nor particularly interesting. Every now and then, as when the incisive Arlene Francis plays her first sharp scene, "Metropole" does manage to show a bit of life.

There are good performances from Reynolds Evans, Jean Carson, Edith Atwater, Henry Jones, Frances Waller and Jane Seymour. Bianca Stroock has contributed some nice costumes and the setting of Edward Gilbert has the magazine-office look.

A raucous and hollow comedy, this "Metropole," and you leave it wondering just why George Kaufman and Max Gordon happened to like it, buy it, and bring it into a Broadway playhouse.

"METROPOLE"

Comedy by William Walden; staged by George S. Kaufman; setting by Edward Gilbert; costumes by Bianca Stroock; presented by Max Gordon at the Lyceum Theatre, December 6, 1949. The cast:

Fanner.....John Glendinning
Miss Merriam..Frances Waller
Stumm.....Henry Jones
Frederick M. Hill...Lee Tracy
Mrs. Killian.....Jane Seymour
Curtis.....Reed Brown, Jr.
Miss Harrington..Edith Atwater
Lois Dantine.....Jean Carson
Carpenter.....Burton Lewis
Mr. Young.....Gavin Gordon
Crowell.....Reynolds Evans
Ellington.....Royal Dano
Carolyn Hopewell.....
Arlene Francis
Furniture Movers...Lee Parry and George Cotton

Synopsis: The scene is the office of Frederick M. Hill, editor in chief of "Metropole". Act I—An afternoon in spring. Act II—A month later. Act III—The following day.

Herald Tribune

NEW YORK

DECEMBER 7, 1949

By HOWARD BARNES

No "Talk of the Town"

THE celebrated editor of "The New Yorker," Harold Ross, is being lampooned in "Metropole." The dramatic profile at the Lyceum, writen by William Walden, is occasionally engaging, but it lacks antic stature. The eccentricities of the central character are brilliantly exposed in Lee Tracy's performance and the George S. Kaufman staging. They alone do not make for much of a comedy. Even with Max Gordon's handsome production, the script is sluggish and repetitive. The real Ross is far more fascinating and gifted than the Frederick M. Hill who is supposedly guiding the destiny of a weekly called Metropole.

* * *

The chief amusement for those who are not intimates of a man who has been described as "a dishonest Abe Lincoln" is in Tracy's tour-de-force of acting. Once more he is at the top of his form, making the most of inter-office skullduggery, a batch of busted marriages and sheer horse-play. Under Kaufman's artful direction, he succeeds in giving the figure of Hill extravagant dimensions. A couple of telephones, or an inquisitive efficiency expert, are all that are needed to set the actor off on numerous comic excursions. Unfortunately, these have so little dramatic depth that one is likely to wonder whether the author actually worked on "The New Yorker," as he is supposed to have done.

* * *

Walden has imagined that his editor has all his best men hired away by a rival publication, controlled by an ex-wife, and gets fired after a fight with the business department of the publication. The conceit barely lasts through two acts. Since the climax solves the tempest in a teacup with a minimum of imagination, "Metropole" is neither good reporting nor good farce. It depends chiefly on gag lines and bits of random business for its laughter. Neither Ross nor "The New Yorker," have yet been properly celebrated in theatrical terms.

* * *

The cast as a whole is very much on its toes at the Lyceum. Edith Atwater is fine as the former Mrs. Hill who tries to put him out of business, but repents at the last moment. She has the difficult job of being alternately sympathetic and unsympathetic and handles it persuasively. Arlene Francis plays a tempestuous actress somewhat too broadly, but Jane Seymour, Reed Brown jr. and Henry Jones are splendid as various employees of the magazine and Gavin Gordon is a fatuous and vaguely menacing chief stockholder. There are good bits, too, by Reynolds Evans and Royal Dano. Lee Tracy once appeared in a hilarious take-off of newspaper business, "The Front Page." "Metropole" offers him too little hilarity.

The New York Times

DECEMBER 7, 1949

AT THE THEATRE

By BROOKS ATKINSON

Although they call the magazine "Metropole" in the comedy that moved into the Lyceum last evening, they mean The New Yorker. And although they refer to the editor-in-chief as Frederick M. Hill, they have in mind the bushy-headed Harold Ross who invented The New Yorker and has tortured it into silken perfection week by week for a quarter century. William Walden, author of "Metropole," has done time at The New Yorker and may have to again.

Even with that expert scalawag, Lee Tracy, sitting behind the editorial desk "Metropole" is only moderately amusing, if we are to look on the bright side of things for a moment. If not, we can frankly admit that, under George S. Kaufman's direction, it is played on the level of a prolonged bellow that is at first deafening and eventually stupefying. Perhaps they play it noisily to conceal the infirmities of a contrived and static script. Whatever the motive, the noise is no solution.

* * *

Fortunately, your correspondent has had no personal knowledge of Mr. Ross' tempestuous genius; which may be one reason why your correspondent has had no ulcers yet. But if the whirling and irascible Hill of Metropole is even a reasonable cartoon of the head fury of The New Yorker he sounds plausible and—if you will pardon the phrase—disarming.

Basically, "Metropole" is the character portrait of an unreasonable, absent-minded, naive, self-persecuted maniac who edits a weekly humorous magazine in a general atmosphere of pandemonium—unhappy about everything that goes into it and with everybody on the staff. Out of this nursing-ground of flourishing neuroses comes the most polished and dextrous weekly magazine in the country. The whole thing is a colossal paradox.

* * *

To keep this character portrait on view for a full evening, Mr. Walden has had to invent a story. He adumbrates a situation in which a magazine tycoon founds a rival weekly, inevitably entitled The Gothamite, and robs the staff of Metropole to write and edit a replica. Apart from the fact that this is a gruesome idea and bad for the morale of literate New Yorkers, it is not a very good story; and before the last curtain comes down it has to run the gantlet of a good many show-shop clichés.

If Mr. Ross were editing it he would crowd the margins of the playscript with a whole series of violent and abusive queries. Probably he would take exception to a plot on general principles. The neatest fine in "Metropole" draws attention to this foible of The New Yorker. The editor of Metropole

asks a subordinate why the magazine had rejected a story that has just appeared in Collier's. "It has a plot," the subordinate declares. This is about as close as the play ever gets to the magazine it is satirizing.

* * *

As if he did not have much confidence in the story, Mr. Kaufman has kept his actors in full cry and on their toes in a conventional farce performance. The cast includes some able actors—particularly Arlene Francis as a temperamental hussy with sharp and contrasting moods, Edith Atwater as an unscrupulous ex-wife, Jane Seymour as a swift-tongued, acrimonious contributor, Frances Waller as an innocent secretary, Jean Carson as a night-club singer, and Reynolds Evans, Gavin Gordon, Reed Brown Jr., Henry Jones and John Glendinning as editorial associates—give lively and interesting performances.

Mr. Tracy is a marvellous and ingratiating actor who knows more ways of bringing variety into a part than most playwrights do. As the editor of "Metropole," he has one of the longest parts of the season; and, as usual, he has mastered it down to the last flick of his expressive hands and a series of facial expressions from cunning to rage. But his acting is noisy. Every episode has to be interpreted as a crisis. Having begun at the top of his bent, Mr. Tracy has nothing more to give the climaxes and the performance becomes monotonous before it is over.

The amusement in "Metropole" gets tinnier and more mechanical as the play shouts down the evening. Mr. Walden can afford to go to school a little longer in The New Yorker's asylum for impeccable writers.

DAILY NEWS

DECEMBER 7, 1949

'Metropole' Kids a Mag. Ed., but A Ross Is a Ross Is a Ross... Alas

By JOHN CHAPMAN

Under the misapprehension that life on a funnypaper must just naturally be funny, William Walden has written a comedy titled "Metropole" and Max Gordon presented it at the Lyceum Theatre last evening with Lee Tracy, one of the best of comedians, in the leading role. There are some good scenes and performances and some wry, humorous lines, but on the whole the play falls short of its aim, which was to be hilarious.

"Metropole" is the name of a magazine of fun, fashion and fancy like The New Yorker. Mr. Tracy is its erratic, explosive, bullheaded and lovable-once-you-know-him editor, just like Mr. Harold Ross, editor of The New Yorker. This resemblance has been broadly implied in all the drama columns for the last few weeks, anyhow—but how correct the implication is I would not know.

My only contacts with Mr. Ross—and they have been frequent down through the years—have not been in his editor's office. They have been on the New York, New Haven & Hotfoot Railroad, where he gets on at Stamford to come to work looking as undistinguished as a Wall Street customer's man who got on at Darien, and at Dutch Treat Club lunches at the Park Lane, where he eats peas with a fork and keeps one foot on the floor when reaching for the butter, just like the rest of us.

Tracy Performs Miracles.

I wouldn't think there was a play in him, and I guess there isn't. Mr. Tracy performs miracles of bellowing, mugging, finger-waving and gymnastics as he portrays the crotchety editor of Metropole. He battles with the business office, with writers, with the office help and with past or future wives. He is enthusiastically assisted by a cast which includes Edith Atwater, Jane Seymour, Reed Brown Jr. and Arlene Francis, and I thought last evening that Miss Francis gave a very smart, sophisticated performance of a smart and sophisticated woman. Yet the comedy seems to be more of a private joke than a public one.

George S. Kaufman did the directing, and I think he did his experienced best to make the joke public and profitable. There is an excellent, dingy office setting by Edward Gilbert. I don't suppose it is Harold Ross' fault that Lee Tracy is funnier than he is, because Mr. Tracy is funnier than almost anybody, and I wish he could get a play that would half-way match his enchanting talent.

New York Post

HOME NEWS

DECEMBER 7, 1949

TWO-on-the-AISLE

By Richard Watts Jr.

Under the possible misapprehension that the distinguished magazine known as the New Yorker is as fascinating a subject to the outside world as it is to the members of its staff, William Walden has written a comedy about it called "Metropole," which opened at the Lyceum Theatre last night. Although it was directed by George S. Kaufman and has the advantage of Lee Tracy's dynamic brilliance in the leading role, the new play does nothing whatever to give credence to any dormant suspicion that the editors and shoptalk of the famous weekly may be among the most interesting topics within the knowledge of modern man.

It is, I must admit, entirely conceivable that a good, racy comedy could be written around the business and editorial problems of the New Yorker and the blissful contemplation of its illustrious ringmaster, Harold Ross, at work and at play. What is considerably more certain, though, is that "Metropole" is not that comedy. Neither good caricature, passable satire nor effective farce, it goes dully and lugubriously on its way, and the sight of some excellent actors virtually knocking themselves out in the laudable determination to make something out of nothing merely adds to the unfortunate glumness of the evening.

Lee Tracy

As everyone knows, Lee Tracy is one of the most vital, vivid and generally satisfying actors on the American stage. Cast as the violent and temperamental editor of a smart metropolitan weekly, Mr. Tracy would seem equipped with virtually his ideal role. That is what the part could be if there were any fun in the play. But, valiantly and shrewdly as he works, "Metropole" refuses to come to life, and the sight of such fine skill and unconquerable vitality thrown away on a role and a story that lack either skill or vitality is a spectacle to make strong men weep.

Mr. Kaufman can usually be depended upon to give vigor and humor to any play that has even a suggestion of them in its writing, but there was apparently nothing in "Metropole" that he could work upon, and his direction is of remarkably little help to the proceedings. There is nothing much more depressing than to watch capable performers working and waiting for gales of laughter that never arrive, and that is what happens most of the time in Mr. Walden's play. There are a few comic moments here and there, but they are rare and far apart.

The Narrative

There isn't even much of a narrative. The first act is chiefly devoted to the outlandish habits and eccentric practices of the great editor, and they aren't particularly exciting. There is quite a bit about the gentleman's marriages, a rival magazine is started, the editor fights with his publisher and the business office and is fired, and in the end he gets his job back, his first wife returns to him, and the threat of the upstart rival publication is ended. There isn't a single plot development that has ingenuity about it, and the manner of telling the story doesn't make up for that lack.

Next to Mr. Tracy, the most effective player is Jean Carson, who is both attractive and gay as an idiot blonde who almost becomes the editor's fifth wife. Edith Atwater and Arlene Francis work nobly as the first wife and a temperamental actress, but they are trapped in dull parts. There is also competent acting by Henry Jones, Jean Seymour and Reynolds Evans in minor roles. No one can blame the actors for what goes wrong with "Metropole." The melancholy truth is that the playwright's touching conviction that the New Yorker and its editor are inherently both comic and irresistibly winning doesn't prove to be true.

New York World-Telegram

DECEMBER 7, 1949

Hedy (In Audience) Outshines 'Metropole'

By WILLIAM HAWKINS.

It was compensatory last night at the opening of "Metropole" in the Lyceum Theater to be sitting behind Miss Hedy Lamarr. Miss Lamarr was wearing a mink coat the color of bituminous, and probably the prettiest face in the world.

Miss Lamarr smiled good naturedly at several simple jokes, the kind available, and laughed audibly when Lee Tracy asked if the Chase National Bank had plenty of money. The truth is, though, that the competition was too tough. Nothing on the stage was half as enticing or distracting as Miss Lamarr.

There may well be a good sharp comedy about a smart humorous magazine whose eccentric editor operated by illogic and battles with the rest of his staff. "Metropole" seems a rough first draft of that play.

The Wit Is Labored.

The two chief reasons for this are that the wit is invariably labored, and that you actively dislike all the main characters. Even a farcical predicament has to involve someone you wish would win, if its attractions are to last long.

Here a dyspeptic and fractious editor, played with heroic dynamism by Lee Tracy, is losing the staff of what we might as well call the New Yorker, to a rich new rival who is also going to marry one of Tracy's ex-wives named Emily.

There is an inexplicable actress in the picture. Tracy gets drunk with her, breaks up Emily's wedding, gets fired and wins his job back, when all the prominent people in America wire condolences.

Actors Have to Fake

On the face of it, this is enough pattern for a rough and tumble comedy. Actually it is so pedestrian that the actors have constantly to fake, with volume and speed where wit dies aborning.

There is, for an instance of far-fetched exposition, one long sequence where the editor and his ex-wife describe in detail to each other the things they did together eleven years before.

Then there is the moment when, in a rage, Tracy accuses another character of talking "conceited, super-duper bushwa," a phrase that cannot be classed as pristine or juggernaut type invective.

The actress phones one of her beaus, and is informed that all his money is tied up "in dust." This is her misunderstanding of "in trust." Previously she has been reduced to expressing a verbally impotent rage by throwing books and manuscripts around the room.

Fast Talker Scores.

Lee Tracy, to repeat, goes through all this with ungrudging energy, albeit without looking fooled as to its comic potential. Edith Atwater can only grow occasionally indignant, and Arlene Francis occasionally infuriated, in their roles as the ex-wife and the actress.

Jean Carson almost makes a brainless singer amusing, and Jane Seymour scores by talking faster and staying on the stage for less time than anyone else.

Gavin Gordon is effectively stuffy as the magazine's business manager, and Reynolds Evans takes good care of an obvious role of a lost intellectual. John Glendinning seems the only mentally balanced character in the play, and Frances Waller and Henry Jones are forced by lack of any stronger suggestions, to characterize their roles by playing with Southern accents.

Journal-American

DECEMBER 7, 1949

Comedy at Lyceum Needs Blue Pencil

By ROBERT GARLAND

If, during his direction of "Metropole," George Kaufman had used a blue pencil along with his pointer, William Walden's comedy about the New Yorker would be funnier. Now, as in a motion-picture, too much is made of almost every scene. In consequence, the laugh is gone before the jest is finished.

As Lee Tracy, Arlene Francis and Edith Atwater work long and loud on Mr. Walden's words, the laughter expires as the jesting survives time after time. I think this is a pity! For, when all is said and acted "Metropole" is a comic sort of comedy, undeleted as it remains.

There is no pretending that the magazine which gives the work its title is other than a New Yorker, that its editor is other than a Harold Ross. On-stage, Metropole is written, edited and placed on sale under the most lofty circumstances. Even a Joe Liebling could find no mote in it.

Its editor, Frederick Hill, is a rugged individualist. Yet, beneath his fierce facade, there is a Rollo Boy. Suppose he never did graduate from a School of Ethical Culture. It is still his alma mater! He, ethics and Metropole are one. No owner, no advertiser dare tell him what to do.

And when they do try, the results are "Metropole" at the Lyceum.

* * *

There are reasons for a chronic pen-and-inkman to find "Metropole" more amusing than his readers. The act-by-act retelling of Frederick Hill's battle with the bosses precludes an inner-sanctum knowledge of what goes on behind let me suggest, a New Yorker's supposedly secret sessions.

And such conflict as there is stems from Mr. Hill's gallant determination to fight the business office, three, four, maybe five former wives and their would-be blond successor all at the same time. But, again and again, printer's ink is funnier than Frederick's females.

To me, a printer's inkman, they are. I find my heartier laughter in Mr. Hill of Metropole when he tries to keep his magazine together, not when, as a Casanova of the weeklies, he tries to keep his lady friends apart. As a great editor, Frederick Hill is not too unbelievable.

As a great lover, he is. And I wish that I could see the scene in which, at Hampshire House, he breaks up one of his ex-wives' wedding. That, I fancy, is funnier seen than heard. "If any man can show just cause why they may not be lawfully joined together, let him now speak, or forever——"

This is where you do not see Mr. Hill come in.

* * *

Lee Tracy Does Well

While Lee Tracy remains addicted to over-accentuation, I do not see how the editor of Metropole can be played otherwise. As star and pivot of the comedy at the Lyceum, Mr. Tracy does more for Mr. Hill than Mr. Hill does for him. Many a time he carries Frederick piggy-back.

Miss Harrington and Miss Hopewell are always on the Avenue in the hands of Edith Atwater and Arlene Francis. Likewise the Miss Dantine of Joan Carson. Smart as all get-out, they act up all evening to the gowns by Lilly Dache and the telephone by the New York Telephone Company.

The minor parts are excellent. Henry Jones as a Metropole-ian called Stumm. And a furniture-mover who is George Cotton if he is not Lee Parry. And a book reviewer who is Reynolds Evans. The directing Mr. Kaufman has chosen his supporting players well.

But he would have done better by them and William Walden's comedy if, during his direction, he had provided himself with a blue pencil and made use of it. George Kaufman is no Hollywoodman to chop each scene down and then chop it up again in repetitious pieces...

"Metropole" does not quite come off, although it may before too long.

Daily Mirror

DECEMBER 7, 1949

Tracy's Acting Surpasses Script of 'Metropole'

By ROBERT COLEMAN

We suspect the first-nighters at the Lyceum Theatre last evening liked "Metropole" better than subsequent audiences will, for it is a highly specialized spoof on a famous editor and the magazine which has come to bear the stamp of his personality. And, anyway, "Light Up the Sky" did a somewhat similar job last season, in superior style, and failed to start a fire in its box-office.

Author William Walden has etched an alternately acid and slapstickish portrait of a volatile reporter who founded a sophisticated magazine, put it across and then spent about twenty years marrying and shedding four wives, fighting a running battle with an obtuse backer and developing ulcers.

A smart first-night audience appeared to relish some of the shenanigans and to find their inspirations recognizable. But we doubt if Mr. and Mrs. Average Playgoer is going to be so familiar with the farcical motivations, or care overly much about them. It all boils down, in the final analysis, to a sometimes clever and esoteric joke, which is stretched tenuously over three acts.

Max Gordon has engaged a representative cast and an outstanding director for the Walden romp. The director, of course, is none other than George S. Kaufman, who has given the production some of the speed, bite and wit for which he is noted. But he has failed, we think, to pace what Arthur Hopkins calls the all-important second act effectively. It starts like an express train and ends like a tired local.

Producer Max Gordon is to be complimented for keeping Lee Tracy with us for a while.

As the able and temperamental editor, Tracy holds the stage and the fort for practically the entire evening. He has, we estimate, one of the lengthiest and most taxing roles in recent seasons, and handles it brilliantly.

Arlene Francis, one of our favorite actresses, is forced to overact a little as a fiery and hammy star.

Thanks to Tracy, "Metropole" has many hilarious moments. His performance is vastly superior to the script. It is a remarkable tour de force. We can only wish that Walden had given him a really worthy vehicle. There is so much to like about "Metropole" and its ingratiating interpreters that it's regrettable there isn't enough.

"Clutterbuck"

DAILY NEWS

DECEMBER 5, 1949

'Clutterbuck' a Happy, Daffy Little English Sex Comedy, Well Acted

By JOHN CHAPMAN

Undoubtedly the reason why our friends in England have survived tough times so well is that they can get the mostest out of the leastest. Take Benn W. Levy's comedy, "Clutterbuck," which was presented at the Biltmore Theatre Saturday evening. There isn't enough in it, really, to make more than a couple of paragraphs—yet Mr. Levy and an engaging company of actors have spun it out and made it a happy and funny theatrical holiday.

This should be good news to people looking for entertainment among the tragedies, social problems and historical sob-getters of the season. It is fun to enter a playhouse and watch the man on the door drop his end of one's ticket into the box. And it is fun to let him drop one's worries into the box along with the stubs. There is no law prohibiting going to the theatre with a light heart and practically empty mind.

"Clutterbuck" is amiable, foolish and politely naughty as a play, and under the direction of Norris Houghton, Arthur Margetson, Tom Helmore, Ruth Matteson, Ruth Ford and Claire Carleton give it an amiable, foolish and politely naughty performance. It's as though author, director and actors had decided to find out just how minimum the minimum basic requirements for a comedy can be.

Easy Style of Acting.

Except for somebody getting up once in a while to change seats, the entire first act consists of Margetson, Helmore, Matteson and Ford sitting in deck chairs on a cruise liner. In the second act they are joined by Miss Carleton and they sit on the terrace of a hotel in a tropical port. In the third act they are back in the deck chairs.

There are only two sudden movements all evening, both made by Miss Matteson. At the hotel, bewitched by sex and the tropics, she leaps upon a bench and yahoos like a female Tarzan. Then, back on the boat, she drops to the deck in a faint.

Mr. Levy, the literary silkworm, has spun a gossamer yarn in which a mysterious fellow, Clutterbuck (who walks in and out a couple of times but never says anything) has been something in the carefree pasts of Mlles. Ford and Matteson, before these handsome and devilishly ingenious hangers for strapless gowns were married to Mr. Margetson and Mr. Helmore, respectively.

Banter and Insult.

Mr. Helmore is a cynical novelist. Mr. Margetson is a silly-ass rubber planter—and there is no one more delightfully funny in this kind of role than he is. While the two women are finding out about each other in relation to Clutterbuck, the men are discovering that Mrs. Clutterbuck (Miss Carleton) used to be their own little cabbage—at different times, of course. Miss Carleton is well stacked, has nothing on her mind but red hair and talks a revolting kind of baby talk by putting an "l" on the end of a word. She is a fittle as fiddle-de-dee, and she disingenuously informs the other ladies that Mr. Clutterbuck always wants to have his women look like tartles.

That is all there is to the comedy. The rest is banter and insult—and the whole thing is light and gay, for Mr. Levy is an adroit and whimsical humorist. Samuel Leve's two sets are appropriately sunny. Charles Campbell, who portrays Clutterbuck, manages to get a word in after the play is over. In a curtain speech he thanks the others of the cast for the fine support they have given him. Second the motion, old boy.

"CLUTTERBUCK"

A comedy by Benn W. Levy; staged by Norris Houghton; setting by Samuel Leve; costumes by Alvin Colt; presented by Irving L. Jacobs, in association with David Merrick, at the Biltmore Theatre, December 3, 1949. The cast:

Julian Pugh.....Tom Helmore
Arthur Pomfret.....Arthur Margetson
Deborah Pomfret....Ruth Ford
Jane Pugh.....Ruth Matteson
Clutterbuck..Charles Campbell
Waiter.....Tom Chung Yun
Melissa.....Claire Carleton

Synopsis: Act I. The deck of a luxury liner. Act II. Ashore: Outside the Hotel Palais Nacionale. Act III. Same as Act I. Early next morning.

The New York Times

DECEMBER 5, 1949

AT THE THEATRE

By BROOKS ATKINSON

If the actors, director and playwright were all of the same mind, "Clutterbuck," which opened at the Biltmore Saturday evening, might be a very funny escapade. Benn W. Levy, who wrote "Springtime for Henry" has written this one in a deliberately artificial style that always becomes the theatre when it is well done.

He puts two couples on board an ocean liner. The two wives adore each other until they discover that they both had had the same lover before they were married. The two men hate each other until they discover that they both had the same mistress before they were married.

* * *

Using the plot like a geometrical design, Mr. Levy then introduces the lover and the mistress, turns everything upside down once or twice and concludes by making the wives friends again and the husbands enemies. Whatever the women hate the men like, and vice versa in the manner of traditional farce. Mr. Levy has deliberately invented a mechanical formula for the fun of comic make-believe.

This was a tumultuously hilarious device when Noel Coward used it in "Private Lives." Mr. Levy is a member of Parliament, which is an admirable achievement for a playwright. But he is not such an outrageous wit as Mr. Coward, and "Clutterbuck" has a number of empty stretches between the amusing switches in the plot.

That is doubtless one reason why "Clutterbuck" as a whole is not as funny as the best scenes in it. But the performance is also a handicap. Norris Houghton has not been able to direct it lightly enough to make the transparency of the plot a vital part of the fun. Instead of realistic comic acting, "Clutterbuck" needs a stylized performance as dry and spinning as a comic dance. It needs insincerity. No one should believe anything that happens in it, especially the actors.

As a matter of fact, the actors do very well on a realistic comic basis. Arthur Margetson, as a dull-witted, conventional Britisher; Tom Helmore, as a light-witted novelist; Ruth Matteson, as a wife without artifice; Ruth Ford, as a wife who poses constantly; Claire Carleton, as a guileless trollop—they all give gusty performances and each of them acts a number of good scenes. If "Clutterbuck" were "John Loves Mary," the performance would be ideal.

* * *

But it is sophisticated farce by an impish playwright, who is using the theatre for a lark. It is in the old commedia dell' arte tradition. Even if it were played in the swiftest, most brittle style, "Clutterbuck" might not be inventive enough to fill the whole evening with humorous delight. But the literal style of Mr. Houghton's direction does not sip much of the cream of Mr. Levy's jest. Our theatre lacks talent for this kind of mannered, topsy-turvy fooling.

NEW YORK **Herald Tribune**

DECEMBER 5, 1949

By HOWARD BARNES

Amatory Antics

THERE is considerable static amusement in "Clutterbuck," which has opened at the Biltmore. Benn W. Levy is an old hand at foisting off small situations with theatrical eclat. In his latest comedy he explores the intricacies of illicit love with clever lines and a minimum of stage movement. Fortunately the cast makes the most of a sophisticated verbal ping-pong game. It postures on the deck of a luxury liner and the terrace of a Caribbean hotel rather than in a drawing room, but the show follows a familiar and rather agreeable pattern.

* * *

Clutterbuck himself doesn't get a word in edgewise until a curtain call epilogue in which he offers condescending congratulations to his supporting players. The few brief glimpses of him, in a riggish outfit, merely give the principals a springboard for frothy and frequently delightful chit-chat. Since he has been the lover of two matrons on the cruise and his wife, who refers to herself as a "tartel," has had her fling with the two husbands, there is a criss-cross of amatory antics in the production. The author has been wise in keeping his farce confined and witty. It may be inconsequential, but it is also inoffensive.

* * *

The performers have been admirably selected for this British importation. Arthur Margetson and Tom Helmore are perfectly matched as a rubber planter and an author, who have enjoyed felicity with a Bohemian who is currently Mrs. Clutterbuck. The former is pompously funny and Helmore is acidulous and slightly dim-witted. There is no real resolution of their predicaments in the script, but it is difficult to see how one could have been contrived. Levy has written a comedy of manners and morals in "Clutterbuck" and his pen has been sharply satirical, even though his construction is wanting.

* * *

Ruth Ford has the part of the planter's wife, who remembers a passage in his friend's novel and decks herself out in a garland of daffodils after a renewal of a burjed romance. Both she and Ruth Matteson, as the writer's wife, achieve a fund of quiet hilarity. In the role of the tempestuous Melissa, or Mrs. Clutterbuck, Claire Carleton points up the tiny twists of the plot with brash relish. Norris Houghton is given credit for the staging of the comedy, but all he has had to do is to have characters change chairs as they discuss their closely inter-related pasts. Samuel Levy's settings and the costumes supervised by Alvin Colt are elegantly in the tradition of high farce. Incidentally, Charles Campbell as Clutterbuck handles his entrances and his curtain speech with humorous dead-pan authority.

New York World-Telegram

DECEMBER 5, 1949

'Clutterbuck' Is Comedy of Rhyme

By WILLIAM HAWKINS

If only the valleys made up for the hills in the course of "Clutterbuck," the evening at the Biltmore could be incomparable.

They do not.

This is the kind of show which depends on comedy of repetition and rhyme. When someone says something like "Look at the view, too, Pugh" it is very funny. But that is a kind of humor which is difficult to sustain for two hours.

Long Arid Stretches.

Benn Levy, who can be remembered for writing more delightful things, has chosen a really spare subject for a plot. It is rather like all the Coward plays one does not want to see again. In "Clutterbuck" there are three married couples on a cruise ship. What else can a playwright do with them but slowly prove that both wives had the same former lover and both husbands the same former mistress? And once that has been established, what can anyone do but be more sophisticated and clever than ever before?

Unfortunately, a scheme like this one leads to long arid stretches which do not quite make up for the delightful moments.

Never Lets Public Down.

In the course of conjugal comparisons there is tossed off one of the funniest jokes of all time, but it, like the rest of the play, demands much presupposition. It involves the line "The same to you," and on its own is hardly very charming.

The acting of "Clutterbuck" is an unpleasant comment on the general health of the theater. Everyone in it is so good that one cannot help wishing the play itself was better.

There is nothing newsy about the fact that Arthur Margetson is excellent as the rubber planter who insists on being intellectual, but that is because Mr. Margetson never lets his, or anyone else's, public down.

Tom Helmore is blessed with much more humor than is the role he is playing. In a pinch he wins.

Ruth Matteson suddenly exhibits more wry, dry comedy than anyone has ever given her credit for, and Ruth Ford gives probably the best performance of her career as a testy wife who has ideas of her own.

Norris Houghton has been more inventive than the script deserves, in his direction, and Claire Carleton is decorative, physically and vocally, beyond measure.

Daily Mirror

DECEMBER 5, 1949

'Clutterbuck' at Biltmore Is an Amiable Farce

By ROBERT COLEMAN

Arthur Margetson, as we have stated on a couple of previous occasions, is perhaps the most underrated actor in our theatre. He is a truly gifted player who can make the most incredible roles seem almost reasonable and often tremendously amusing. And he turns that very trick in an amiable farce called "Clutterbuck."

The new arrival at the Biltmore Theatre was penned by Benn W. Levy, a member of Britain's Parliament. It is somewhat like another English theatrical importation of some seasons back, titled "George and Margaret," to the best of our recollection. In that readily forgettable piece, the characters giving the script its name never put in an appearance.

Well, Clutterbuck appears in "Clutterbuck," but so briefly that you barely get a chance to see what he looks like. But at least half the dialogue is motivated by him. A rubber planter and a novelist take their wives on a tropical cruise, and who should also be on the liner but Clutterbuck, with whom both the young matrons had spent some memorable moments in Venice.

Clutterbuck's wife also is aboard, and, surprisingly enough, both the rubber planter and the novelist had had some gay times with her in London. The wives contrive to recapture memories from their pasts with Clutterbuck, while their husbands do likewise with Clutterbuck's wife. It is all very complicated and, for us, unbelievable, but this "Reigenlike," hands-around, plot offers some vastly funny sequences.

Margetson is wonderfully droll and ingratiating as the obtuse rubber planter. He makes implausible situations sparkle as though they were cut from genuine credible comedy. With the twitch of an eyebrow, with a futile move of a hand, with admirable restraint, he works magic.

Tom Helmore, Ruth Matteson, Ruth Ford and Claire Carleton are excellent in other important roles.

Norris Houghton's direction gets more from the script than Levy wrote into it. He commendably resists the temptation to let the proceedings degenerate into outright slam-bang farce. The settings by Samuel Leve and costumes by Alvin Colt are festive, a welcome contrast to some of the drab backgrounds and habiliments that have afflicted our eyes in this semester.

It is easy to see why Irving L. Jacobs and David Merrick decided to produce "Clutterbuck," which has been available, we understand, for quite a while. For it offers several hilarious episodes that had a majority of the first-nighters howling at intervals. But it is, we suspect, too frail and spotty for a solid click. Despite some clever Levy lines and Margetson's superlative performance, "Clutterbuck" doesn't quite come off.

Journal American

DECEMBER 5, 1949

Benn Levy Comedy Feathery and Funny

By ROBERT GARLAND

Coming out and saying so, I had a high old time night before last at "Clutterbuck." This, at the Biltmore, is the Benn Levy comedy which, since its English success a pair of seasons back, has been in the American producing hands of such fraidy cats as George Abbott, Jose Ferrer and Alexander Cohen.

After enjoying it last Summer at Elitch's Gardens in Denver, Irving Jacobs decided to bring it to Broadway. This, in association with David Merrick, he has done. As is his custom, he has given it an as-right-as-possible production with excellent cast, beautiful backgrounds, tasteful costumes and well-tempered direction.

And a right-as-possible production is what "Clutterbuck" calls for. Benn Levy's is a comedy which, in a manner of writing, throws itself away. Of a profoundly nonsensical turn of phrase and mind, it is as nonsensically profound as "Alice in Wonderland" in its take-them-or-leave-them social implications.

I have always considered the Mad Hatter as the only thoroughly sensible individual at his own tea party. Well, he could have written "Clutterbuck." He, Benn Levy and nobody else that I can think of, although Noel Coward has pretty much the same idea in, or in between, "Private Lives" and "Fallen Angels." But he is heavier!

* * *

Staged on Liner

In "Clutterbuck," three couples are on a pleasure cruise from England to the Caribbean. Julian Pugh and his wife, Jane. Arthur Pomfret and his wife, Deborah. Mr. Clutterbuck and his wife, I think, Melissa. You meet them on an unnamed luxury liner. The Pughs and the Pomfrets deck-chair side by side, neat enough. And tidy!

They are neat enough and tidy until Mr. Clutterbuck appears. Although a short and silent fellow, he throws a lovely-looking monkeywrench into the Pughs' and Pomfrets' machinery. The lovely-looking monkeywrench is Melissa. She has been on "tartel" terms with Julian and Arthur.

Melissa talks baby-talk. And the things she says, the havoc she creates, by itsy-bitsy hints of not-quite-forgotten indiscretions are as feathery, foul and funny as anything the recent theatre has brought. There is no doubt that Mr. Clutterbuck's lady is a monster with charm, form and sex appeal.

Absolutely nothing really happens as Benn Levy's follow-up of "Mrs. Moonlight," "Art and Mrs. Bottle" and "Springtime For Henry" moves through three acts and two scenes at the Biltmore. Only light and twinkling dialogue to which you have to listen and bitterness and revulsion to which you need pay no attention.

* * *

Discreet Producing

Irving Jacobs, for whose production of Harry Brown's "A Sound of Hunting" I shall be forever grateful, is a man of taste and discretion. Now, as in 1945, he gives his offering the best of everything. Now, as then, his play, his players and his production are one. He is, in the short or long run, a theatre perfectionist.

The play, as I have said, is as profoundly nonsensical as it is nonsensically profound. It gives me a high old time. The players could not be bettered. Arthur Margetson, an expert comedian, is at his most expert as Arthur Pomfret. Ruth Ford is better than I have seen her as the Doborah who once was Mr. Clutterbuck's.

Tom Helmore, back from the Hollywoods, is an excellent Julian Pugh. Ruth Matteson is his equal as the Jane who, too, was once Mr. Clutterbuck's. Charles Campbell is safe and silent as Mr. C. Not until after the final curtain does he open his mouth and address the congregation. It is well worth waiting for.

Claire Carleton fills every requirement, one of which is a tight-ish bathing suit, as Melissa, the human monkey-wrench in the Pugh-Pomfret machinery. Tom Chung Yun is slyly entertaining as House Boy at the Hotel Palais Nacionale . . . "Clutterbuck" is a comedy of bright and bitter nonsense, with the bright side always up. See it—and chuckle!